

Molly: London, Ontario: known as one of the greenest and most resilient cities in Canada. Wait, what? Okay, maybe it isn't, yet. That's the London Environmental Network's vision for our city. This podcast asks how close we are to realizing that vision. This is a tour of sustainability in London. I'm Molly Miksa. I'll be your tour guide.

Hello! We're talking today, in this final episode of the series, about cycling. This is a topic near and dear to my heart. I've been a commuter cyclist all of my adult life. In Toronto (in my old life) I was chief photographer for a magazine called Dandyhorse, that looked at all aspects of bicycle culture in Toronto. In London I have volunteered with London Cycle Link, and have met some of my favourite Londoners through the cycling community.

So the question I've been asking throughout this podcast is: is London one of Canada's greenest and most resilient cities, and if not, what do we need to do to become one? Where cycling is concerned, the focus is often, largely, on infrastructure. There aren't many protected bike lanes in our city, and people don't feel safe cycling on major roads without them. But there are other things that make a city bike-friendly. The two issues that are playing so heavily into every topic are the pandemic and climate change. My two guests today will speak to all these issues, and more.

I interviewed them separately, but covered some similar ground, so I'm going to ping-pong it a bit with the interviews. Let's start with introductions. My guests today are Ben Cowie, owner of the London Bicycle Cafe, and Luis Patricio, board chair for London Cycle Link.

Ben: Hey Molly, I'm Ben Cowie. I am the owner of London Bicycle Cafe here in London, Ontario. London Bicycle Cafe is a family cycling business. We do cargo bikes and electric bikes and city bikes and all kinds of things. I sit on the City's Cycling Advisory Committee, which advises the City of London on cycling issues.

Molly: Well, he used to. I interviewed Ben in November, 2020. He has since stepped down from the Cycling Advisory Committee. More on that later though.

Pre-pandemic, the London Bicycle Cafe was part bike shop, part coffee shop and community hub. In past years, Ben held several events at the shop (advocacy events around cycling and active transportation, as well as music concerts). He's also organized group rides, and started the Facebook group [London Ontario Frostbike](#), which has inspired and supported many local cyclists to get out cycling in winter. Before he opened his bike shop, Ben studied Earth and Environmental Sciences at McMaster, got a PhD in Geoscience at the University of Calgary, and did a postdoc at Harvard, looking at the Earth's oxygen cycle. It's safe to say he has a good understanding of the science of climate change, and is very frustrated at the rate of action being taken.

Luis Patricio is someone I've known for a while. We sat on the board of London Cycle Link together. Luis is currently working at Pillar Nonprofit Network, on a project promoting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. He's done a variety of interesting things, but keeping

on topic, he has worked for New Hope Community Bikes in Hamilton, identifying barriers for kids walking and biking to school. In Brazil, where he's originally from, Luis was the local coordinator for Bike Anjo, where he led a team of 40 volunteers offering learn-to-bike workshops. And he translated a children's book called Yellow Bicycle from Portuguese to English, and published it in Canada. I spoke to Luis in November, 2020 at Innovation Works.

Luis: So my name is Luis Patricio. Currently, I'm the Board Chair of London Cycle Link. I'm a father of three, grew up in Brazil, moved to London, Canada, four years ago. I don't own a car since 2007. Ride my bike since 2004. And I'm a big believer that cycling is part of the solution for better cities.

Molly: Here here! That's a lot of stuff, but I also believe you have a master's degree in urban management. Is that true?

Luis: That is true. Yes. And my thesis was about promoting cycling. Basically, around bike-to-work. So the research with almost 30 companies back in Brazil, and what were the incentives to promote bike commuting, and how effective they were.

Molly: I started my interviews with Ben and Luis by asking them how they thought London measured up, in terms of being a green and resilient, bike-friendly city. Starting with Ben.

Outside of London, you've spent time in Hamilton, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Montreal, and also outside of Canada in Boston and Berlin. And I think you've been riding a bike in all those cities. So in your experience, how does London stack up compared to those other cities, in terms of bike friendliness?

Ben: I think the question in terms of bike friendliness can be answered in terms of, you know, how many people in the city choose to ride a bike. And I think in all of those cities London's dead last in the number of people that choose a bike for transportation every day. We have less than 1% of our population choosing to ride a bike every day, and that sort of tells the story about how bike friendly we are. One of the things I've noticed about living in all these different places are that people are basically the same everywhere—we're not too different from our friends in Germany; we're not too different from our friends in Montreal; we're not too different for friends in Vancouver—and that people respond to the same kinds of incentives. So if a city makes it safe and convenient and comfortable to ride a bike, people will choose that. And if the city doesn't make it safe and convenient and comfortable to ride a bike, they won't. So I think that London's dead last in terms of ridership, and I think it's dead last in terms of safety as well.

Molly: And then to Luis, more generally. Do you see London at the moment as being an environmentally sustainable city, or that we're moving in that direction?

Luis: The first part of the question is easy to answer. It's no. If every city in the world was like London, we would be gone a long time ago. But I think most cities in the world are not actually sustainable the way that we are conducting business nowadays. The second part, if you're

moving in that direction, this is a bit trickier, because I think, I can see many initiatives in our city that create sustainability, really changing the way that we're doing things. Even, you know, talking about cycling specifically, or the zero waste movement, water conservation and energy, many things. But I don't know if the initiatives moving in the opposite direction are stronger. So it's hard, for me at least, to say what is the balance there.

Molly: And then, the challenges are growing. But we'll get to that later. I see you as a visionary person, with sort of big dreams and visions, and the idea that they're possible. So can you tell me—what do you imagine for London, with regard to enabling and encouraging cycling for all Londoners?

Luis: First of all, I think cycling infrastructure is definitely something that we need, and something that we're building, although we do need to build faster. So that's number one.

Molly: Ben adds to that.

Ben: 5A is the new 3A. So 5A is always available to all ages and abilities, which means that it's cleared in the winter and lit at night. Most people won't use their bikes to get around unless they feel completely safe. And the level of safety that's required is full separation from motor vehicles in virtually every circumstance.

Luis: We're talking about bike lanes that can be used by five year old kids, by adults, by senior citizens. And that network—and hopefully it's not a minimum grid, it's a maximum grid that reaches every part of the city. That network is connected and it's convenient.

Molly: I think it's safe to say that among cycling advocates, there is consensus that what the city needs most is a grid of bike lanes—protected bike lanes—connecting all points in the city.

Ben: You have to start with spines, and build a grid that can get you around parts of the city, safely, easily, conveniently and directly. Those are all the things that are important to people riding. Is it safe? Is it fast? Okay, I'll take it.

Molly: So what does the current bike infrastructure in London look like? I reached out to city staff in late 2020, and received a list of three projects underway, plus 29 projects that had been implemented between 2016 and 2019. Those projects totaled almost 70km of bike lanes, buffered bike lanes, cycle tracks, paved shoulders and bi-directional in boulevard pathways, including 2.6km of “sharrows and signs.” But the only separated bike lanes were the ones on Colborne and King Streets, and the one on King was temporary and is now gone.

Based on the City's website circa May 2021, the following are scheduled: bike lanes for Brydges, Wavell and Saskatoon Streets, a Colborne cycle track extension, a boulevard bike lane on Wonderland Road South, and bike lanes as part of a new Hyde Park Road and Sunningdale Road West roundabout.

Recently there was a push for bike lanes on Dundas Place, the newly completed flex street in downtown London. This ultimately resulted in Dundas Place being blocked to through traffic. It's not separated lanes, but it should still be an improvement safety-wise.

The City has been criticised for not having staff dedicated to active transportation, but in April 2021, Daniel Hall, former executive director of London Cycle Link, became the city's first active transportation manager.

That sounds good, but how does it feel to be riding a bike in London? It depends. On most major streets, it feels unsafe. On the Thames Valley Parkway (TVP), the City's primary multi-use recreational trail, it feels lovely (unless it's flooded).

I asked Luis what he thought the challenges were to cycling in London.

Luis: What we need first is obviously a network of protected bike lanes. But we also need to build the culture, and our challenge is to do this much faster than the rate that we've been doing so far. And I think it is also a challenge—because that is what we need to do—is provide opportunities for people to see it. Since we are a car centric city, you can grow up in London and not see cycling as a possibility at all. Sometimes it's very hard even to make sense—to make people understand all the benefits, and how feasible it is to bike, even in a winter city like London, a Canadian city. The most bike friendly cities are, you know, Copenhagen—they're from Northern Europe, and they definitely have a harsh winter as well.

Molly: Would you say that—I mean, to me, I think that the safe places to cycle are not the busy streets. So when people are riding their bikes in London, on streets that don't have a bike lane, they are more likely to take a side street because they don't want to take Richmond Street because it's not safe (or Wellington or Wharncliffe). And so those people are driving in their cars, and they're not seeing bikes. And then it sort of loops that they're not seeing bikes, they don't believe that people are cycling. And then they see the odd person there that doesn't seem to belong. But it's a reinforcing loop of people sort of hiding away from the major routes. And so the major routes continue to be not safe, which again, plays back to, you know, needing the infrastructure.

Luis: That's a very good point, and I would even go beyond that. I think even those drivers who see cyclists on those side streets, they don't see them actually. A bicycle is much smaller than a car, it doesn't make any noise, doesn't really create any danger. So people are not aware of bikes in general. And this, it's my lived experience of people not noticing me, and being run over by even pedestrians sometimes, because they just don't see the bikes. But also, some research shows that how people, even cyclists, are surprised when you install bike counters, by the numbers. And the numbers are usually much higher than what the perception that people have. Just because they don't notice, all the bikes are already actually there.

Molly: Can I just go back one second, somebody listening might wonder how a bike is run over by a pedestrian. I'm not saying I haven't had this experience, but do you want to say what that means?

Luis: Well, and sometimes this is happening on a painted bike lane, right? I'm riding slow, and I clearly have the right of way, and a pedestrian is crossing the street. And that person just crosses, and it's like you're not there. You're moving. He just doesn't see there is a bike coming. And yeah, just bumps into you. It happened to me a couple of times.

Molly: It does sound crazy, but I think that's the thing, that people are just—there's not a critical mass of cyclists in London, that pedestrians, that cars, that everyone is just expecting that there might be a bike there, and opening their eyes.

OK, let's take a minute to talk about bicycle collisions. Rebecca Henderson is a PhD candidate at Western University. She is also a past board member at London Cycle Link and past advisor on the City's Cycling Advisory Committee—in the same group who proposed the Cycling Master Plan Review with Ben Cowie.

Rebecca's research at Western has looked at collisions between motor vehicles and bicycles in London—1,656 of them between 2006 and 2017. Rebecca spoke with me and shared some of her research findings around key cycling safety issues.

The number one issue? Speed limits. In collisions where motorists' were driving over 40km/hr., 100% of bicyclists were injured. At more than 50km/h, major and fatal injuries increase sharply. The recommendation? "Motorists' speeds should be kept under 40km/h for its low probability of severe injuries and the relatively high proportion of collisions that result in no injury."

Other key safety issues:

- Afternoon peak: 40% of collisions occur between 3 and 7pm
- Sidewalk cycling accounted for 35% of collisions, mostly related to a motorist entering or exiting a driveway.
- "Right hook": 34% of cycling collisions occurred when motorists were making right turns
- 15% of collisions involved a cyclists being struck from behind:
- Distracted driving was a factor in 11% of collisions, with equal numbers of motorists and cyclists being distracted.
- High collision intersections accounted for 63% of collisions.
- High frequency collision neighbourhoods were noted as Central London, and Argyle (specifically Dundas and Clarke Rd.)

In her research, Rebecca acknowledges that the City of London is increasingly focussed on bicycle safety. However, she cautions that the City must "move beyond commitment, and set actionable priorities to design roads and address speeds to eliminate injury and death."

There has been movement on this. The City of London tweeted on Dec. 17, 2020: “This year, our Area Speed Limits program began lowering speed limits on roads with high levels of pedestrian and cycling activity. Lower speed limits help make our streets safer for all road users.” We don’t have time to really wade into the muck here, but limits were reduced to 40 km/hr on these streets, while the Cycling Advisory Committee’s report had recommended 30 km/hr.

So what would you say we’re doing right in London?

Luis: There are several initiatives. London Cycle Link, that I am part of. The Squeaky Wheel is one of the main projects with London Cycle Link. The community bike shop, it’s a place that has been bringing together many different groups. And again, talking about the diversity and reaching out to different audiences. Having the Bike For Newcomers. So you have, you know, people that come from all over the world to London, and they have very different experiences when it comes to cycling. But they can come here, and they can have a chance to just ride their bike, because we’re providing bikes for free, because you’re helping them to find the routes.

Molly: The Squeaky Wheel Bike Co-op lets people fix their own bikes with the assistance of staff and volunteers. It also hosts WTF (or women-trans-femme) bike repair nights. As Luis mentioned, Squeaky Wheel is a part of the London Cycle Link, an organization that is, to quote their website, “helping Londoners ride more, by building their confidence, advocating for safe streets, and developing a thriving bike culture.” In 2020, London Cycle Link partnered with Big Bike Giveaway (an organization that has been giving free bikes to Londoners in need since 2014), to provide bikes to frontline workers, at no charge. These aren’t the only bike-positive initiatives that Luis pointed out, though.

Luis: I think the Cycling Advisory Committee plays a very important role, and I hope we can keep that committee active.

Molly: And that is a committee that advises City Council.

Luis: Exactly. We have other advocates; we have the Big Bike Giveaway; we have the many bike shops that support cycling; we have the London Bicycle Cafe; we have the Bicycle Mayor; we have the Western Active Transportation Society out of Western University. We have different initiatives, and I think when many of those initiatives are decentralized, and they can reach to different groups, different demographics, different areas in the city, I think this plays a very important role in cultivating the cycling culture. And like I said, the bike lanes as well. But um, again, we are very far from what we actually need to create a minimum, or hopefully a maximum grid, to make cycling really convenient in London.

Molly: That list isn’t exhaustive, but all of it isn’t enough to make this a safe cycling city. So let’s go back to Luis’s visionary vision for London, that I asked him about earlier.

Luis: Like in other parts in the world, you’re choosing to ride a bicycle, not because you want to save the planet, you’re choosing to ride a bicycle because you get there faster. It’s just more

convenient, it's faster, it's easier. But I think you use the right word when you say "visionary." I don't know if I am a visionary, but I think it's also a matter of vision. Because to get to that maximum grid it takes a lot of time and resources, and before we get there I think we need to at least be able to imagine it. So talking about one way of enabling and encouraging people here in London to cycle more, or get closer to being a bike friendly city, it's creating those possibilities where people can just see, just can have the vision. And really the sky is the limit here. We're talking about art, using art and sharing the story. It's webinars. Could be, you know, like the Richmond underpass mural talking about bikes. It could be getting people together. It could be the bike rides, and people are seeing us, and it's fun, and you have the Glow Ride. All those things can help create a more bike friendly city.

Molly: I asked Luis about the goal of creating a connected grid of bike lanes. And if you would suggest any other goal.

Luis: This is definitely a very important goal. I guess it depends who will be working to achieve that goal, because it is important. It's crucial to have an appropriate cycling infrastructure. But again, it's easy to just sit back and say, "Well, I don't have the money; I'm not making the decisions; I can't do anything about it." So that's a tricky one. In a simple goal. I'd say, and this might be an appropriate metaphor, since this is the London Environmental Network. Right, like—when you want to plant, you want to increase biodiversity, or you're thinking about organic agriculture with diversified, different cultures, or a food forest. And you think well, what is the goal? What are the things that I need to plant? So before choosing whatever you're planting, you need to make sure that the soil is rich, like the soil is fertile, then you can plant pretty much anything. I think one goal is really to make that soil rich. And maybe this is something that is more achievable for the average person. And the goal could be to make sure that your friends—all your friends, 50% of your friends, or maybe it's your household—tried biking to work or biking to school once a week, for that many months. Or it could be even simpler. It could be, make sure that everybody that you know watched one of the many amazing movies that shows how cycling can really make our cities better. Or even making art about bikes and imagining, try to imagine and like draw your city, and what would you like to see in your city? Like what kind of community you would like to see. I think those things are really important. If you can't imagine, if people can't at least in their minds see that happening, it's much harder. Again, if you don't have a rich soil, it's much harder to have this in reality. So I think this could be—one of those things could be a very significant goal to have.

Molly: Yeah. Beautiful. It seems like the pandemic has been an entry point for a lot of people, here and elsewhere. And I'm just curious, why do you think this has been the entry point? That bike's been sitting in the garage for 10, 20 years sometimes, I'm sure. And this is the point that they're going to bring it out.

Luis: So it was convenient. For many reasons it was convenient. You didn't have other options for physical activity, and cycling, all of a sudden, was just much more, not only safe, but—you know, there's no pollution, there's no noise, it was just nice to ride our bikes. And we saw how the air pollution dropped all over the world. If only we could imagine that this could be the norm

in our cities. We can still run our economy. It was a problem because everything was closed, and now we're talking about a huge economic depression. But if we could only imagine that our economy is still running, but without the cars. And it is possible. In some cities, that's how it works. And it could work anywhere in the world really.

Molly: Ben speaks to the same idea.

Ben: There are cities around the world that have had success in taking that as an opportunity. And Paris' mayor, Anne Hidalgo, is incredible, and she's said that you will no longer be able to drive your car across Paris, ever. That's how Paris is going to operate now. If you want to drive a car into Paris, to do a delivery, that's fine, but you're never going to be able to cross the city in a car again. You know, you're going to be able to walk and cycle and take transit, and have everything available in your neighborhood. Those are all really big picture important city goals that were accelerated by COVID. As opposed to the leadership that we're seeing here in London. We've got counselors who are saying, no, we can't use this as an opportunity for big change, we have to go back to the way things were. And I think that's just a failure of leadership that we're seeing here in London from this council, particularly.

Molly: I'm gonna loop back to city council and infrastructure, but I want to talk a bit more about the pandemic and cycling culture first. Ben describes the shift that happened in the spring of 2020.

Ben: Families were looking for something that they could go out and do together. And with nobody traveling, you know, no commuting traffic, neighborhood streets became places again, rather than thoroughfares for cars. And that is what brought people out of their house and riding through the neighborhood as a family, and you could see it on our street. And we saw more kids riding on the actual street—the roadway street, rather than the sidewalk—in our neighborhood than we've ever seen in three years of living in our current space. But you could see it all over the city, there were families and kids out riding together. The pathways were parked to the point that the city had to like, try to do some traffic calming on the path, because there were so many people out riding.

Molly: On the TVP (Thames Valley Parkway)?

Ben: Yeah, on the TVP. And at my store, we did twice as many repairs as we had done in any previous year.

Molly: Wow.

Ben: So, you just run out of basic parts. The entire bike industry was run out of basic parts by about July. We couldn't order new things if we wanted to by that point. So like basic stuff, like tubes and tires and chains, you just couldn't order them because globally, there has just been this huge uptake in cycling.

Molly: Wow. I remember, too, seeing lots of people that with, you know...they might have other spanky new bike stuff, but maybe they didn't seem real confident in riding, or jumping back and forth on the sidewalk, or kind of hesitating about using their hand signals. But in those days there were very few cars on the road, so any safety concerns, as you're suggesting are reduced, because there just aren't the cars out there. And then once the cars get back, it's a scary place to be if you're not confident.

Ben: Yeah, exactly. And so those people stopped riding. They didn't just keep braving the streets after the cars came back. They just stopped riding. And I think that's the lesson here, is that people want to ride but they feel unsafe. And I can't blame them, to be honest. I'm out there every day, and I've had enough close calls that I... You know, for people who aren't committed to riding your bike every day, you know, that would feel terrible. One of the close calls that I have would be enough to keep someone off their bike for a couple months probably.

Molly: Well, and especially, say, if you've got Rosie on the back.

Ben: Yeah! I've got zero tolerance for anybody getting close to us when I'm riding with her. And it just changes your whole perspective when you're riding with the kid. You think differently when you're out riding on the streets and knowing that her safety is on you. And it's not entirely on you; it's on everyone around you, too. So we choose much safer routes; we don't go to a lot of places that I would go on my own, just because I just don't feel safe riding with her.

Molly: Obviously safety is a huge concern, and one that will keep riders off the roads (or on the sidewalk, where they're not legally meant to be). I wondered though, did all the new cyclists really stop cycling once the cars started to get back on the roads? Or once they'd had a taste of cycling, did it start to stick?

An article in Outside magazine, titled "The Pandemic Bike Boom Is Here to Stay," talks about bike sales in different countries over the course of the pandemic. Trends show declines where people were fully locked down, followed by spikes, when they were able to get outside. Initial spikes were followed by downturns, followed again by a leveling off that was consistently higher than pre-pandemic rates. The same article talks about it taking 8 weeks for habits to form, generally. Since we're well into year two of this pandemic, that's plenty of time for people who've started cycling, to have adjusted their mindsets. Empirically, as of May, 2021—and locked down again—I'm definitely seeing a lot more people on bikes than I used to, pre-pandemic. In the long term, time will tell.

Another huge reason to hope for more people traveling by bike, is climate change. The bicycle is a very resilient machine, in all kinds of ways. So, the City of London declared a climate emergency in 2019. I asked Ben, and then Luis, what role the bicycle could play in mitigating climate change.

Ben: Oh boy, so many things! So yeah, the climate emergency—it got trendy to declare a climate emergency in 2019. I think that a lot of cities did it without really a good understanding of

what that actually means for your city. And I think that we still haven't quite got there yet. But I think the idea of declaring a climate emergency is to acknowledge that our way of life currently, is going to destroy our way of life for future generations, that there's not really a "future us" anymore. And one of my good friends that I met at Harvard, Cristi Proistosescu—he's a professor in Illinois right now, but he said something like, 2020 isn't the warmest year on record. It's the coldest year that we'll ever experience going forward. And I think that's the most powerful way to start thinking about things, is that it doesn't get better from here. And the wildfires in Australia—remember when that was the biggest, most terrible thing that happened in 2020? You know, that seems like it was decades ago. Wildfires in California, you know, those are huge indicators that we've changed our entire planet's, how it functions. And that's going to have enormous impacts on how we produce food, how we get water, how we move ourselves around, and how natural ecosystems adapt and respond to us. And I think recognizing that we're part of a system—we're not just humans, and then nature, we're all part of one big system that all works together—is something we really have to start feeling a little bit more, at the personal level. We're not separate from all of these things that are happening, and we're not insulated from it anywhere on the planet. And the thing that keeps me up at night is what Rosie's future is going to look like. You know, 20 years ago, people were debating, "Oh, is this a real thing?" And I think now we've got some very strong evidence that not only is that a real thing, it's our worst case scenario. You know, we're approaching our scenarios where billions of people either die or are displaced from tropical regions, because of just straight-up heat. You know, we've got hurricanes that make landfall, stronger and later, in coastal regions. We've got sea level rise. You know climate changes isn't something for the future; it's now. And we have to take urgent action like it's an emergency. And you know, the emergency policy that the City of London—we still, 18 months later, don't have a plan. That doesn't speak like an emergency case, to me. I think that our city staff have really let all of us down by not delivering something in the first six months, maybe even the first three months. If you're going to declare an emergency, let's drop everything and focus on that emergency. That's the kind of thing we have to be doing right now. There is no tomorrow; there is no wait five years, there is no wait 10 years.

Molly: It's now.

Ben: It's now. This is it, this is the only chance we are going to get, in our history of civilization, to solve this problem, is the next five years. And we're doing nothing, you know we've wasted the first year and a half of those five years.

Molly: Yeah. Just to revisit the question again about bikes and climate change: in a general way, not even just for London, but like how bikes can mitigate climate change...

Ben: Yeah, I think bikes are the ultimate climate solution. Bikes are not only zero carbon transportation, but they're more energy efficient than anything else we've ever invented. So I think that that's a huge benefit to cycling as well. Ultimately, climate is an everything problem: it's a built environment problem; it's a transportation problem; it's a food problem. So if you're thinking more about transportation of goods, you've got cargo bikes; if you're thinking about transportation for schools, kids can ride to school safely, then you've taken all those

diesel-spewing school buses off the road. If you can get your daily errands done without a car by using a bike—you can do most of that stuff without having a car.

Luis: And I don't know if people realize—it's not a matter of "if" it's a matter of "when and how." I mean, not only global warming, but the resources, the natural resources, and oil production and everything. This will come to an end. We talked a lot about peak oil, and I think this conversation is kind of diluted a little bit now. I even see people dismissing. "Oh, peak oil. This didn't happen." And I think they—it's kind of a misinterpretation. I think they read "peak oil" as the end of oil, but it's *peak*. We were at the highest point of production, and this is declining. This is a fact. And it's publicly available information. There is a term EROI—energy return on investment— which is basically the amount of energy that you need to use to produce or to obtain energy sources. The EROI has been constantly declining over the years, which means that energy is getting harder to obtain. So you need to spend much more energy to obtain those sources of energy. At one point, we will run out of those, or at least we won't have enough for everybody to use. So the question really comes to—and I didn't even talk about all the possible environmental crises with global warming, and you know, the ice caps melting. So the question is really: when are we going to shift? Because the sooner we start, the easier it will be to do that transition. The longer we wait, the more abrupt it will be, that—that we won't be ready for that transition.

Molly: And I think, you know, there's this idea of—I don't know, this is big for me right now that—you know, it's all these goals of like, you got 10 years. It used to be, you know, 25 years or whatever, 20 years, and now they're saying around 10 years, like, if we don't change drastically. And I think this idea of "You have 10 years," makes people think, "I have 10 years! I can kind of relax this year, next year." It doesn't mean that. It means you have zero years to start changing, and you have to be very well changed by 10 years, you know?

Luis: Exactly. They usually kind of identify two types of ways of dealing with climate change, or those crises, right? You have the deniers who just say "No. Like, this never happened before. This can be happening now." Like, they just can't put their head around it. And the other type is people who just, you know, they're, "Well, if this is happening anyways, why bother at all? I would just enjoy the rest of the time I have left. I can't really change this. I'm just one person." So I think it's important to be aware of all those changes coming, but we really need to focus on what we can do, and what are the possibilities that we have to make things different. And I think that's why I talk about cycling. And I think it's important to show how cycling can be helpful. And cycling has proved to be a very resilient tool in many crises, not only the last one. We just had a cycling boom all over the world during COVID. But also in other natural disasters. When you have, you know, an earthquake, and even during war. And you see people realizing that with a bike—it doesn't need a lot of resources and a lot of space to park a bike, reach someone, carry things, carry people. And when we're living in an age of abundance, it's easy to dismiss that. Oh, I can just use a car. But as we come closer to an age where the cheap fossil fuels are being depleted, that advantage of cycling will become more and more apparent. I really think that it is important to focus on, even though we need to be aware, you know. Oh—global warming, and you know, we won't have food and we won't have land, and all those problems that might happen. But really focus on the things that the bike can provide, which is: healthier cities, better

air quality, more equitable transportation for everyone, and many other benefits that the bike can offer.

Molly: Yeah, and the low tech solution. You can learn how to fix it yourself. You can learn how to build it yourself if you go that far.

Molly: So what do we have to do now?

Ben: Yeah, what do we have to do now? And I think we did that work. Part of our work at the Cycling Advisory Committee, is we outlined what that looks like, from a cycling perspective, in a climate emergency, last year, in a report we delivered to staff and council that shows what we need to do to meet our climate goals regarding cycling. And so we have—I think the target has to be considered in percent number of trips. So of all the trips you make, how many of those have to be by walking, cycling, transit in order to reach our climate goal by 2030. And so to reach our moderate climate goal by 2030, we need to take roughly 70% of our trips by walking, cycling or transit, in order to meet our climate targets for 2030. So currently, we make 76% of our trips by car. We need that to be under 30. So we need to cut our driving by half, and then a little bit, by 2030 to get to a point where we actually can meet our climate targets.

Molly: The report Ben referenced is a 58 page review of the city's Cycling Master Plan, in light of Council's adoption of both the declaration of climate emergency and Vision Zero principles. Vision Zero means that no loss of life or serious injury on roads and highways is acceptable. In 2017, Council adopted Vision Zero principles. The report was submitted to the Civic Works Committee in October 2019. According to a Global News article, the committee members “voted to receive the latest report from the cycling advisory committee and to have city staff look at its recommendations and suggestions only when time and resources allowed.” This decision to seemingly shelve the report, called into question the respect and responsibility given to, or as the article puts it, effectiveness and efficiency of, all of the city's advisory committees. Ben stuck it out with the CAC, but on March 25, 2021, he sent a resignation letter to the chair. The letter states in part, “London's stunning lack of progress on protected bike infrastructure, compared to other cities its size and scale is inexplicable and irresponsible, given the stakes of a disrupted climate system.”

Well, here's hoping that we can have some new vision on that.

Ben: Yes. We need new vision. We need new leadership. We need all the things right now. And we don't have a lot of it right now. But that's the issue, is that there's this big vacuum. There's a void of leadership here, in our city.

Molly: And I think historically, we're not a fast moving city.

Ben: No, we're not. And I think that's going to kneecap us in the future. The world is changing faster than we are changing, and the end result will be that we're not going to succeed, as a city.

Molly: On a local level, are there things that make you hopeful about cycling in London, and active transportation?

Ben: Peter Kavcic at the City. He's a junior engineer who's really learned the trade of building good cycling infrastructure, and he gets it. You know, there's a couple staff people who are really into that world, of understanding how to design stuff. But I think ultimately, the change that's coming doesn't come from that level, it has to come from grassroots. It has to come from people who are fundamentally demanding change. You know, it isn't political will that's missing, it's political pressure that's missing. Politicians respond to what their voters say. If you're sitting here listening to this, you're probably already in tune with a lot of these issues. You're like, "Yeah, I'm totally upset about this, I want to change." But most people in our city are pretty comfortable. I think that there's this middle suburban London that is super comfortable with their life, and I think, until that kind of person is demanding change, we're not going to see political level change in our city. And you won't see that pressure that actually moves policy, that moves direction of how we spend our public money, how we allocate our public space. All of that stuff comes from people at the grassroots level. And I just don't see a lot of movement happening at that level, here in London. There's a little bit, but it's not at the scale that you see in a lot of other places.

Molly: If you listened to the last podcast, on waste in the city, you might remember Jay Stanford saying something quite similar to this—that now, there's only *hundreds* of Londoners, and many businesses, contributing to environmental change. But for us to truly succeed, we need thousands of Londoners involved, and we need hundreds of businesses involved. "And that's all coming," Jay said.

I do think this is a city that wants to listen to its residents, tries to give a voice and listen. So let's be heard, good folks. Let's be heard.

Ben: We don't need a few spectacular people. We need like a billion climate activists, on a planetary scale, who are really driving this forward. Everyone needs to step up and do their little pirate, whatever that is, in your community right now. And if we don't do that right now, then that's it. We don't get another chance at this.

Molly: Yeah. David Suzuki said something similar that, you know, it's not that everyone needs to become an activist, or work for Greenpeace, it's that everyone in every job needs to be essentially an activist, but needs to be making change, right?

Ben: Yep, exactly. And I think the idea that any format of the status quo—you know, nothing's sacred right now. Nothing can be sacred. We have to be willing to let things go that aren't working, and won't work in a climate constrained world. I think we need to be really honest with ourselves about that. Right now we have an opportunity to choose our future. Rosie, my daughter, won't have that opportunity. I get to choose that future for her. And we all get to choose that feature for her.

Molly: Sharing is one way of reconsidering the status quo, in aid of the environment, as well as promoting equity. We don't all need to own our own everything. We can share tools and other things. We can share herbs with our neighbors, as people are doing in London's Old South neighborhood. We can share cars, and we can share bikes. Bike share programs have been adopted in many Canadian cities over the past couple of decades. The first, according to Wikipedia, was operated by Toronto's Community Bicycle Network, starting in 2001. Wikipedia mentions programs in Montreal, Hamilton, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton and Kitchener. The systems vary, but generally speaking bike share members have access to a number of bikes in their city, which they can use and then leave at any designated location.

Ben: Programs like bike share, obviously, are super helpful for integrating with transit. So if you want to have a really good transit network, the easiest way to make your transit network better is to have bike share at the end of it. That means that you can just cover more ground from your main spines of transit, and make those transit lines more useful. When I lived in Toronto, I used to take Bike Share, and you'd take the subway halfway across town, and then get on a bike share bike to get to wherever you're going. Makes life really easy to get around by transit.

Luis: One thing that I think it's on the edge of the things that we're doing right, the challenges that we're facing, I would add the bike share system. And I say that it's on the edge, because we're actually thinking about implementing one. So I hope that we do. It might start April 2021. And I think, again, just having bikes spread around in different parts of the city, and then of course, people using those bikes, and much more people seeing bikes on the streets, and making it convenient—you don't even need to have a bike to ride a bike, if you have a bike share system. I think this is a very important step into creating a bike friendly city.

Molly: In September 2020, April 2021, had been suggested as a target for launching London's bike share program. Prior to that, in April 2018. A staff report have estimated March 2020, as a launch date. The latest, courtesy of Daniel Hall, London's active transportation manager, is that they're sending a revised request for proposals to vendors in late spring/early summer 2021, which could mean a decision regarding the program will be made by late summer, with possible implementation in late 2021 or early 2022. And so we wait.

Something that relates to bike share is, you know, this is systems that are created for people that may be visiting the city, or maybe don't have their own bicycle. And it relates to a lot of people picking up bikes who haven't before during COVID. And I think this is great—the more people riding—but it also presents the challenge of people who are new riders—they need to be protected, right?

Luis: Yeah, and this is interesting. And I've talked about how important it is to have cycling infrastructure. And in most of the cases, this is what happens. You have the cycling infrastructure, and they say, if you build they will come. So in most cases, you have the cycling infrastructure first—the bike lanes, the protected bike lanes—and then you have an increased number of people riding. But this is not always the case. There are—I think, the most significant example that I can think of is Santiago in Chile, where there was an increase of riders before

there was any significant change in the cycling infrastructure. And because the number of riders increased, there was actually a push for safer infrastructure to support those new riders, those people who were starting to ride their bikes. And there are some other examples in Europe and even Asia.

Molly: I would say even Toronto could be described that way. A lot of people on bikes, not really that much infrastructure.

Luis: Mmm hmm. So those things, they're reinforcing each other at the same time. So even creating a bike share system or creating possibilities for getting new riders on the road, could be a factor that will boost the construction of new bike lanes and protected bike lanes. And some people might even say, well, this might not be the safest way to get people on bikes, without the proper cycling infrastructure. But um, another thing that is shown over and over, is safety numbers. And the more people you have riding bikes, the safer it is. The number of traffic collisions with cyclists reduce—and not just in a relative sense, but in an absolute sense, you actually have a decrease of cycling collisions—which is usually collision with a car—those are the most problematic. And I think this speaks to what we were just saying, right? Once you get more people on bikes, everybody just gets used to it. Then they're expecting to see bikes, and they're driving or walking, considering that they might run into a cyclist.

Molly: What I would call mental infrastructure.

Luis: Yes. That's an amazing term, yeah. The mental infrastructure. You made me think about, and we talked about my master's in urban management. And one of the findings of that study was a survey with—trying to remember now, it's been a few years—I think 700-800 people in different companies in the city—in different parts, different size of company, different sectors—and try to understand what's the difference? What are the elements that really make people ride their bikes or not? And there were the obvious ones. Very obvious: you need to have a bike. Right? Which, this is, even though it's obvious, this is actually what motivated the first bike share systems. Oh, people don't have bikes. So let's make sure that they have access to bikes, even if they don't have one. Anyway, they know, or at least they think they know how to ride a bike. But one of the interesting findings, that really makes a difference if you'll be biking to work regularly, is if your co-workers think it's a good idea for you to ride a bike. So it's this, you talked about the mental infrastructure. I think this is the social infrastructure of riding a bike. So just the support, is just you know—and this is an individual perception, right? People didn't feel that they biked to work, and people are saying, "Poor guy. He's riding a bike instead of driving a car," or they're like, "Good job. Good for you; you're a cyclist. I wish I could do what you do." You know, those were the kind of comments those people were listening to. And the research showed that did really make a difference. So this is why I think that exposing people to cycling, and showing them how positive that can be—even if they're not riding their bikes, yet—this is a step towards a cycling city. Because even to build all that infrastructure, you need people to support. If you have a population that is against bike lanes, you know, building a maximum grid can really take a lot—a long, long time. But even if you don't have a lot of people cycling, but have people who support cycling, that infrastructure can come much quicker.

Molly: And once you get there, get on the bike, the benefits start coming in. Like: wow, I feel better. Like: I wasn't stressed out getting to work. (You know, as long as you feel safe.) You have clarity in your mind, because you're moving and you're in fresh air and it feels good. You're not just sitting there stuck in traffic, or sitting at the train track in London. Then you get the health benefit. Then you get the, you know, it didn't cost as much—starts rolling in.

Luis: Yeah, it's interesting when I started using the bike as my main vehicle in 2004. The reason I started is, I moved to a different city, and it just was just too big, and I was confused driving a car. So I started riding a bike because it was slower. And I could—you know, which street am I going to? Where am I? It was just easy to navigate the city. But quickly I realized that you know, I was saving money, I was feeling better, and all the other benefits. Like, environmentally, I wasn't polluting anymore. And I think there are entry points, many different entry points, for different people. So at the beginning, we were talking about all the creative ways to introduce bikes to people. And I think that's it, because you will find different entry points for different people in different stages of their lives.

Molly: Any final thoughts?

Luis: No, I think this is good.

Molly: Thank you so much.

Luis: You're welcome.

Ben: There are so many benefits to riding a bike every day, that we should be doing everything as a society to encourage that. Make it easy for people, and make it safe for people to choose the bike. You know, all those people who are more healthy are taking up less space in our hospitals, they're taking up less space on the road. They're just making it easier for everybody to live a good life.

Molly: Just as a closer talk to those people who are comfortable in their SUV, and may be just thinking about getting a bike. Why do you love riding a bike?

Ben: Yeah, I mean riding a bike just feels fantastic. Every day you go out and you get to smell the fresh air and you get to experience. We've got some pretty spectacular green spaces in the city, and the Thames Valley Parkway cuts all through the city and gives you a chance to ride a bike in nature in the city. It is pretty spectacular. It's a wonderful way to spend an afternoon, and maybe it becomes part of your lifestyle somewhere down the road, once the city makes those changes to make it safe to ride to the grocery store and beyond. I hope that you can come out and enjoy what we do have and what we have made safe, and that should be your impetus to start doing this a little bit more. You don't have to do this all overnight, but just start with one, and go from there.

Molly: Awesome, thanks Ben.

Ben: Yeah, thanks Molly.

Molly: Personally, I don't see it as an either-or. It is a both-and. We need the physical infrastructure, and we need to build the social and mental infrastructure as well. There is a growing community of cyclists and cycling advocates in London, and there is some political support. There is also an urgency to get cars off the road and deal whole-heartedly with the climate emergency. And although they may be harder to procure in pandemic times, there are lots of options in bikes these days. E-bikes are allowing more people to ride more. Cargo bikes are giving families and businesses options for going car-free. Big Bike Giveaway and Squeaky Wheel Bike Co-op are giving people with low or no income access to bikes to ride.

Are there things we haven't talked much about? Heck yeah! There are other barriers to cycling, like a lack of either protected or basic bike parking facilities. And there is a huge problem with bike theft in our city. Bicycle Mayor Shelley Carr has done successful advocacy work around both these issues, but there's much more to be done.

While I personally have always felt empowered and secure on my bike, many women don't. Many people of colour, don't. Many parents with their children, seniors, people with disabilities, don't. Many professionals going to the office don't either. There is work to be done, to create a culture and a city that are friendly to cycling and indeed all forms of active transportation. Shifting the majority out of their cars will also inevitably build community support and resiliency, as people see each other and interact with each other more. So. Many. Possibilities.

That I will leave you with. Because we have come to the end of this podcast journey. So what do you think? Is London one of Canada's greenest and most resilient cities? I think we're bursting with potential, but so far we're kind of still an underdog in this race. I hope in some small way this series can help push the needle a little farther into green.

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